

Jeffrey Steele
Domestic Policy Subcommittee
Oversight and Government Reform Committee
New Orleans, Louisiana
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My name is Jeffrey Steele. I testified in front of the Subcommittee at the hearing in Washington, DC on June 26th.

I currently live in Montgomery, Alabama. Before Katrina, I worked in Atlanta and met displaced residents who had evacuated from New Orleans. I decided I wanted to be part of history. I wanted to come down to help rebuild.

I testified in June that I was recruited by Pastor Braddy who was looking for workers for New Orleans. He promised free room and board, free food and \$10 an hour. I left Atlanta on October 16, 2005 in a small van with others who had been recruited by Braddy. We arrived in New Orleans the next morning and were put straight to work with nothing to eat since we'd left Atlanta. We slept that night in the same van we'd come down in.

Up until September 2006, I worked in New Orleans for several different subcontractors doing clean up work. Many of these companies are still doing business and have offices in New Orleans today. - Workforce Development; Phoenix Global; Copeland Construction; Hamp Construction, Xpress Staff and JNE. They were

connected to Omni Pinnacle, Waste Management, ECC and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The work in New Orleans was hard and dangerous. The days and nights were long and hot. We had no health insurance, no workman's compensation or any other benefits. We worked 16-18 hour days - seven days a week.

I lived with 40-60 other guys in a small house when I wasn't crammed into small, dirty apartments. We had very little to eat. We had to eat relief handouts or MRE's. Most of time, we were starving!

None of those companies paid me correctly for the work I did. The pay was always late and every paycheck was short. There was never any overtime pay. And the companies took deductions out for housing, food and transportation. For the first three months of work in New Orleans, I received only \$2,000 instead of the \$17,000 I had earned – no overtime.

I tried to get back what I was owed by talking with people at the Law Clinic. They sent my case to the Department of Labor in September, 2006. When I hadn't heard anything for a long time, I called the DOL directly in February 2007. I was asked if I had information about my previous employers. I gave whatever information I had.

In March 2007, the DOL called back and said they would file my claim. When I called back a month later to find out

what was happening, the same woman said that *when she found out something she would let me know*.

I didn't hear anything back from the DOL until right before the Sub-Committee Hearing in June 2007. A DOL supervisor called me and immediately began interrogating me. She ended the call by saying she wanted me to call her when I had more information. She treated me as if I were the bad guy.

Since the Sub-Committee Hearing in June, I have heard from the DOL only once when they called and asked me for more information. That was in July, right after the hearing. - I haven't heard from them since.

I went to New Orleans to help and to be part of history. I did the dirty, hard clean up work that was needed. But, like a lot of other workers, I was taken advantage of by contractor after contractor. I have been seeking justice, but haven't seen it yet.

As I said in June, this is not about Jeff – it's about the small men and women, like me, who don't have a voice. There may be another disaster like this in some other state and town.

Who can tell me how workers will be treated? Can you tell me who will protect us the next time?

Thank you.